

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1225

INFO AMCONSUL KARACHI

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SUBJECT: TARBELA DAM: PROGRESS REPORT

REFERENCE: ISLAMBAD 4943

SUMMARY. RESERVOIR IS RISING SATISFACTORILY AND SHOULD BE FULL BY END OF AUGUST. SEEPAGE THROUGH AND UNDER THE DAM IS 20 PERCENT LESS THAN LAST YEAR BUT MORE THAN TAMS CONSIDERS WELCOME. AS LAKE RISES, LATENT POSSIBILITY EXISTS THAT SEEPAGE COULD BECOME EXCESSIVE ALTHOUGH TAMS ENGINEERS BELIEVE THIS UNLIKELY. CRITICAL DATA TO WATCH IS OCTOBER 1 WHEN DECISION WILL HAVE TO BE MADE WHETHER SEEPAGE IS WITHIN TOLERABLE LIMITS OR WHETHER REMEDIAL MEASURES WILL BE REQUIRED INCLUDING REMOTE POSSIBILITY OF AGAIN HAVING TO EMPTY RESERVOIR. TAMS IS UNDERSTANDABLY ANXIOUS TO AVOID GIVING IMPRESSION THAT PRESENT SITUATION GIVES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GROUND FOR ALARM. END SUMMARY.

1. FOR SOME WEEKS THERE HAVE BEEN DISQUIETING RUMORS THAT ALL MAY NOT BE WELL AT TARBELA AND RECENT VISITS BY PM BHUTTO TO DAM SITE AND SUBSEQUENT CABINET MEETING ON THE SUBJECT OF TARBELA ONLY HEIGHTENED THESE REPORTS. ON JULY 23, FEDERAL FINANCE MINISTER MOHAMMAD HANIF MADE PUBLIC STATEMENT IN KARACHI THAT TARBELA DAM WAS BEHAVING SATISFACTORILY AND REPAIRS WERE PROCEEDING ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE. TO ASCERTAIN TRUE PICTURE OF THE SITUATION, ECON/COM COUNSELOR AND AID CHIEF ENGINEER SPENT FULL DAY AT TARBELA JULY 23 TALKING WITH TAMS PERSONNEL, ESPECIALLY CHIEF DESIGN ENGINEER ERNEST BOWLES AND VISITING TAMS PARTNER, JOHN LOWE.

2. COUNSELOR AND AID OFFICER CAME AWAY CONVINCED THAT RUMORS OF PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED AND THAT SITUATION AT THE DAM IS INDEED GENERALLY SATISFACTORY. WHILE SEEPAGE IS MORE THAN TAMS WOULD LIKE, READINGS DURING LAST SEVERAL WEEKS INDICATE THIS IS NOT INCREASING AS RESERVOIR FILLS AND IS WITHIN TOLERABLE LIMITS. MISSION OFFICERS INSPECTED THE DRAINAGE CANAL AT THE FOOT OF THE DAM INTO WHICH MOST OF THE SEEPAGE FLOWS, AND THE AMOUNT OF WATER FLOW SEEMED MODEST AND NO CAUSE FOR ALARM. THE TAMS PEOPLE POINTED OUT THAT BEING AN EARTH-FILLED DAM SOME SEEPAGE IS INEVITABLE. NEVERTHELESS, TAMS PEOPLE PRIVATELY EXPRESSED CONCERN ("LET'S KEEP OUR FINGERS CROSSED.") THAT THE SEEPAGE WILL NOT WORSEN.

3. TIMETABLE: THE RESERVOIR IS NOW RISING AT THE RATE OF ABOUT TWO FEET PER DAY AND THE MAXIMUM RIVER FLOW INTO THE RESERVOIR IS EXPECTED DURING THE FOUR-WEEK PERIOD JULY 20-AUGUST 20. BY THE END OF THAT TIME, THE RESERVOIR SHOULD BE FULL, AND PM BHUTTO HAS ASKED THAT IT BE FILLED AS HIGH AS POSSIBLE TO MAXIMIZE THE AMOUNT OF WATER AVAILABLE FOR IRRIGATION FOR THIS COMING WINTER'S CROPS. AFTER FILLING, PLANS ARE TO KEEP IT THAT WAY FOR ONE MONTH TO CHECK FOR ANY PROBLEMS AND TO ALLOW TIME FOR STILLING BASINS TO BE REPAIRED. IF ALL APPEARS WELL AND SEEPAGE IS DETERMINED TO BE TOLERABLE, THE RESERVOIR WILL GRADUALLY BE DRAWN DOWN FOR IRRIGATION PURPOSES STARTING OCTOBER.

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4. TUNNELS: TUNNELS 1 AND 2 (THE POWERHOUSE TUNNELS) ARE NOW REPAIRED AND WILL BE FILLED WITH WATER UP TO THE MID-POINT GATES THIS WEEK. CONNECTING THE OUTLET OF TUNNEL 1 TO THE POWERHOUSE VIA PENSTOCK IS BEING DELAYED UNTIL THE OCTOBER 1 DECISION DATE TO ALLOW FOR POSSIBLE EMERGENCY DRAWDOWN OF THE RESERVOIR THROUGH TUNNELS 1 AND 2 IF THIS SHOULD BE REQUIRED. TUNNELS 3 AND 4 (THE IRRIGATION TUNNELS)

ARE NOW CHANNELING ALL INDUS WATER THROUGH THE DAM DOWN STREAM. ABOUT AUGUST 7 THESE LATTER TWO TUNNELS WILL BE CLOSED TO ALLOW REPAIR WORK TO BE DONE IN THE STILLING BASIN BELOW THE DAM. DURING THE TIME ALL FOUR TUNNELS ARE CLOSED, THE RESERVOIR SHOULD RISE TO THE TOP AND THE EXCESS WILL BE RELEASED OVER THE TWO SPILLWAYS. THE GATES ON TOP OF THE SPILLWAYS (WHICH WHEN CLOSED ENABLE THE RESERVOIR TO RISE ANOTHER 60 FEET) WILL BE SLIGHTLY LIFTED STARTING ON AUGUST 10 TO RELEASE ENOUGH WATER CONTINUOUSLY OVER THE SPILLWAYS TO MEET DOWNRIVER IRRIGATION DEMANDS AND STILL ALLOW RESERVOIR TO RISE TO MAXIMUM HEIGHT.

5. SINKHOLES: SINKHOLES APPARENTLY CONTINUE TO OCCUR IN THE CLAY BLANKET EXTENDING A MILE AND ONE-HALF UPSTREAM, BUT TAMS ENGINEERS DO NOT BELIEVE THEEJ REPRESENT A THREAT OR ARE THE MAIN CAUSE FOR THE SEEPAGE. THE SINKHOLES ARE, NEVERTHELESS, BEING MONITORED CAREFULLY BY MEANS OF SIDE-SCAN SONAR. TWO SELF-PROPELLED BARGES ARE DUMPING FILL OVER THE SINKHOLES AS THEY APPEAR.

6. DEDICATION OF THE DAM: TAMS ENGINEERS WERE HESITANT TO ESTIMATE WHEN THE DEDICATION CEREMONY MIGHT TAKE PLACE BUT SAID THAT IF ALL WENT WELL IT WOULD PROBABLY OCCUR NEXT SPRING. THEY WERE SURE IT WOULD TAKE PLACE BEFORE THE POWERHOUSE UNIT WAS READY AT THE END OF 1976.
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